

# An Examination of Different Interpretive Approaches to False Prophecy in Jeremiah

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**Abstract:** The purpose of this article is to identify the criteria different biblical scholars use to determine true versus false prophecy. This article will examine six different approaches. The first approach examined is the historical critical method. The second, third, and fourth approaches examined are the canonical approaches of Brevard Childs, James A. Sanders, and James E. Brennenman respectively. The fifth approach examined is the socio-scientific approach. The last approach examined is the contextual approach. Jeremiah 28 is used as a test case for how each approach attempts to identify true and false prophecy. It is the argument of this study that antecedent revelation available to the prophet's audience is key to the identification of the criteria for determining true versus false prophecy and that this is only possible using the context method.

Keywords: Canon, Prophecy, False Prophecy, Historical Critical, Jeremiah, Deuteronomy

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## Introduction

The purpose of this article is to identify the criteria different biblical scholars use to determine true versus false prophecy. This is an incredibly important issue because it bears on the ability of people to be able discern truth versus falsehood, specifically how an audience can know that a prophetic message is from God. Sheppard eloquently summarizes the significance of the topic when he states, "Discerning true from false prophecy is presented in

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scripture as a matter of life and death. It lies at the heart of any claim of divine revelation within Judaism and Christianity.”<sup>2</sup>

Before moving on to the identification of criteria for distinguishing true versus false prophecy, it is important to define prophecy. Overholt defines the core concept of a prophet as being a religious intermediary who mediates messages between humans and deities.<sup>3</sup> This definition is a good starting point and clearly defines what a prophet does. On the other hand, the definition does not really help determine if/how it would be possible for the original audience who heard the prophecy to discern true from false prophecy.

This study will proceed in the following manner. First, this study will survey six different approaches that attempt to define criteria for discerning true from false prophecy. Jeremiah 28 will be used as a test case for how each approach attempts to determine true versus false prophecy. Finally, the criteria for determining true versus false prophecy that were available for use by the original audience will be delineated. It is the argument of this study that antecedent revelation available to the prophet’s audience is key to the identification of the criteria for determining true versus false prophecy.

## **Prophetic Criteria: Determining True from False Prophets**

### *Historical Critical Approach*

Like a great deal of OT scholarship, the critical study of prophets/prophecy began with Julius Wellhausen and his popularization of Graf’s thesis that the Pentateuch came after the prophets.<sup>4</sup> Wellhausen was not original in this idea. He was

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<sup>2</sup> Gerald T. Sheppard, “True and False Prophecy with Scripture,” in *Canon, Theology, and Old Testament Interpretation*, ed. Gene M. Tucker, David L. Petersen, and Robert W. Wilson (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 262.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas W. Overholt, “Prophet, Prophecy,” in *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. David Noel Freedman, Allen C. Myers, and Astrid B. Beck (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 1086.

<sup>4</sup> Rolf Rendtorff, *Canon and Theology: Overtures to an Old Testament Theology*, trans. Margaret Kohl, 1st English language ed., *Overtures to Biblical Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 57.

dependent on his teacher Ewald's scholarship.<sup>5</sup> Blenkinsopp explains the implications of this idea very well when he states:

The critical approach to biblical prophecy also broke with the traditional Jewish view according to which the prophet was essentially a tradent of law, both written and oral. Since, according to this view, everything necessary for Israel's life had been revealed at Sinai, the prophetic message could not contain anything new. At most, it could spell out what was only implicitly contained in the Sinaitic revelation.<sup>6</sup>

This does not mean the prophets created their messages out of thin air. Virtually all critical scholars accept some dependency on traditional materials. There is, however, a consensus among critical scholars that continues to today that the proposed P and D sources were not part of that material and that they in fact came after the prophets.<sup>7</sup>

Form criticism is another tool used in the historical-critical approach. The two primary names associated with form criticism of prophetic literature are Hermann Gunkel and Claus Westermann.<sup>8</sup> Form criticism attempts to identify the life situation of originally oral units that compose a text.<sup>9</sup> Gunkel correctly points out that the primary means that prophets used were oral, and that in order to interpret the prophets correctly, these speech units need identification and delimitation.<sup>10</sup> Westermann expands on this idea when he argues

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<sup>5</sup> Walther Zimmerli, *The Law and the Prophets: A Study of the Meaning of the Old Testament*, trans. R. E. Clements (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), 19.

<sup>6</sup> Joseph Blenkinsopp, *A History of Prophecy in Israel: Revised and Enlarged* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1996), 17.

<sup>7</sup> Julius Wellhausen, *Prolegomena to the History of Israel*, trans. John Sutherland Black and Allan Menzies (Edinburgh: Adam & Charles Black, 1885), 392–393.

<sup>8</sup> David L. Petersen, "Ways of Thinking About Israel's Prophets," in *Prophecy in Israel: Search for an Identity*, ed. David L. Petersen, *Issues in Religion and Theology*, ed. Douglas Knight and Robert Morgan, vol. 10 (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 3–4.

<sup>9</sup> John Barton, *Reading the Old Testament: Method in Biblical Study* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984), 31.

<sup>10</sup> Hermann Gunkel, "The Prophets as Writers and Poets," in *Prophecy in Israel: Search for an Identity*, ed. David L. Petersen, trans. James L.

prophetic speech is generally characterized by the messenger formula that was common in other ANE cultures such as Mari. This messenger formula is characterized by the commissioning of the messenger by God, the transmission of the message to the speaker, and finally the delivery of the message.<sup>11</sup> The only way the historical-critical approach can work for distinguishing between true and false prophecy is if the tradition the prophet used for his message can be identified with a high degree of certainty. This would involve using form criticism to identify the *Sitz im Leben* of a prophetic oracle in order to ascertain the tradition. This identification is at the very least difficult and most likely impossible. In addition, there are also many problems with the identification and dating of sources. The late dating of Deuteronomy and the priestly source to the time after the prophets is based on many assumptions that have not been proven. Because of these caveats, it seems very unlikely that the historical-critical method could derive any criteria for determining whether a prophet is true or false. This premise will be tested by examining the interpretation of Jeremiah 28 by James L. Crenshaw.

Crenshaw argues that the distinction between true and false prophecy is based on the different prophets using different traditions. In the case of Jeremiah 28, he believes Israel's election tradition is the central conflict between Jeremiah and Hananiah.<sup>12</sup> An excellent example of how historical-critical scholars see these traditions developing can be seen in von Rad's volume II of his *Old Testament Theology*.<sup>13</sup> Crenshaw believes that Hananiah was a preserver of the traditions exemplified by Israel of God as being deliverer. He helpfully points out that the narrative is clear that Hananiah believes God has given him the message. Crenshaw also believes Jeremiah does not know if he is actually a true prophet when Hananiah

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Schaaf, *Issues in Religion and Theology*, ed. Douglas Knight and Robert Morgan, vol. 10 (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 24–25.

<sup>11</sup> Claus Westermann, *Basic Forms of Prophetic Speech*, trans. Hugh Clayton White (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1991), 101.

<sup>12</sup> James L. Crenshaw, *Prophetic Conflict: Its Effect Upon Israelite Religion*, Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft, vol. 124 (New York: de Gruyter, 1971), 71.

<sup>13</sup> Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology: Volume II: Theology of Israel's Prophetic Traditions*, trans. D. M. G. Stalker (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1965), 23, 30, 32, 74, 117, 239, 308.

confronts Jeremiah. The confrontation triggered an existential crisis for Jeremiah who has to go away and receive confirmation from God before proceeding.<sup>14</sup> The problem with existential interpretation is there is no evidence in the passage of any kind of psychological reaction in text. The exegete would need to look at other texts such as Jeremiah 11:18–12:6; 15:10–21; 18:18–23; and 20:7–18. These passages clearly show Jeremiah was at times in psychological anguish. The texts indicate a desire for vindication by the people, not any uncertainty about the message.<sup>15</sup> The most likely explanation is that Jeremiah went away to verify he had received the proper response from God. It was not that Jeremiah doubted the message, but that because of the dramatic actions of Hananiah he wanted to make sure he got the response right in order to reinforce his original message.<sup>16</sup> This is clear in the yoke of iron response in Jeremiah 28:13–14. Jeremiah 28:11 simply says that Jeremiah left.

This methodology only allows for a restricted way of determining true versus false prophecy. Gerhard von Rad has a very helpful statement: “The falsity cannot be seen either in the office itself, or in their words themselves, or in the fallibility of the man who spoke them. It could only be seen by the person who had true insight into Yahweh’s intentions for the time, and who, on the basis of this, was obliged to deny that the other one had illumination.”<sup>17</sup> Crenshaw believes that this inability to define criteria for true versus false prophecy led to the decline, and finally the extinction, of prophecy, which was replaced by the wisdom and apocalyptic genres. He thinks the lack of historical claims (an intrinsic part of prophecy) in both wisdom and apocalyptic literature allowed those genres to continue to address the concept of divine justice during the decline and after the end of prophecy in Israel.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Crenshaw, *Prophetic Conflict*, 72–73.

<sup>15</sup> R. W. L. Moberly, *Prophecy and Discernment*, Cambridge Studies in Christian Doctrine, ed. Daniel W. Hardy, vol. 14 (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2006), 107n14.

<sup>16</sup> Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Message of Jeremiah: Grace in the End*, *The Bible Speaks Today Old Testament*, ed. Alec Motyer (Nottingham, England: InterVarsity, 2014), 286.

<sup>17</sup> Gerhard von Rad, *The Message of the Prophets*, trans. D. M. G. Stalker (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1967), 179n13.

<sup>18</sup> Crenshaw, *Prophetic Conflict*, 103–109.

There are a couple of considerations in evaluating the historical-critical model of false prophecy. The first consideration is how does the general agreement that Jeremiah 28 is recounting an actual event from the life of the prophet Jeremiah affect their argument?<sup>19</sup> It is logical that if the critical scholars accept the historicity of the event, they should assume that Jeremiah and Hananiah both would have expected their audience to not only understand their message but they would also expect their audience to be able to evaluate the truthfulness of their message.

The second consideration is that according to this model, the exact nature of the historical scene cannot be ascertained from the existing redacted text; therefore the only criteria that can be adduced according to the final redactor of Jeremiah is the Deuteronomistic true/false prophecy criteria of fulfilled prophecy.<sup>20</sup> The best this analysis can do is to argue that the final redactor believed that the only valid criteria for determining false and true prophecy was whether the prophecy came true. This argument tells us nothing about how the original audience would have judged between the claims of Hananiah and Jeremiah. The reasonable conclusion is that there must have been some background context/information available to the witnesses of the confrontation that would allow them to determine the truthfulness/falsity of the prophetic message. Scholars of all backgrounds have recognized the connection between Deuteronomy and Jeremiah.<sup>21</sup> This seems likely to be the best place to look for background information especially since the Deuteronomistic prophetic criteria is included in this passage. The problem with this for the historical-critical view is that while the Deuteronomistic information would have been available for the author/redactor of Jeremiah, it would not have existed for the original audience who witnessed the actual event because of their dating assumptions. The logical conclusion of this conflict is that their model does not allow

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<sup>19</sup> William Lee Holladay, *Jeremiah 2: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah, Chapters 26-52*, Hermeneia, ed. Paul D. Hanson (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 127.

<sup>20</sup> Robert P. Carroll, *From Chaos to Covenant: Prophecy in the Book of Jeremiah* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 187.

<sup>21</sup> Walter C. Kaiser and Tiberius Rata, *Walking the Ancient Paths: A Commentary on Jeremiah* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2019), 9.

for the existence of criteria for true/false prophecy that would have been available to the witnesses of the original confrontation.

### *Canonical Approaches*

#### **Brevard Childs**

Brevard Childs pioneered a new approach to biblical interpretation, which centered interpretation on the final form of the text and the canonical context.<sup>22</sup> Central to Child's canonical interpretive approach is the idea that both theological and historical dimensions characterize the canon. Childs explains this idea well:

The formation of the canon of Hebrew scriptures developed in a historical process, some lines of which can be accurately described by the historian. Semler was certainly right in contesting an exclusive theological definition of canon in which the element of development was subsumed under the category of divine Providence or *Heilsgeschichte* of some sort. Conversely, the formation of the canon involved a process of theological reflection within Israel arising from the impact which certain writings continued to exert upon the community through their religious use.<sup>23</sup>

Childs sees the formation of the canon as a process that includes redaction of Scripture all the way up to the fixing of the final form of the text.<sup>24</sup> This is significantly different from the traditional orthodox Christian view that the canon was a process of recognition by the Jews and the church of the books that manifested evidence of divine inspiration for the Hebrew Bible and New Testament.<sup>25</sup> The previous quotation demonstrates that Childs's ultimate criteria for canonicity was the usefulness to the Jewish people and/or the NT church, not any sort of divine revelation. This provides the background necessary

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<sup>22</sup> G. T. Sheppard, "Childs, Brevard (1923–2007)," in *Dictionary of Major Biblical Interpreters*, ed. Donald K. McKim (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2007), 304–305.

<sup>23</sup> Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 58.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>25</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1988), 16–17.

for examining how Childs applied his methodology to the question of true versus false prophets.

Childs emphasizes in his interpretation the analysis of how the final editor shapes the various pieces of tradition. Sheppard concludes Childs believes that God has validated the prophets (specifically Jeremiah) because the message of the prophets came true.<sup>26</sup> Sheppard also concludes Childs wants to maintain a degree of continuity between the original context and the canonical context but that the “application of older prophetic traditions goes beyond the original situation.”<sup>27</sup> Childs does not believe the reworking of traditions in the canonical process extends to our contemporary culture, only to the final textual form. Childs states,

No one should underestimate the great attraction which such a rendering of the Bible has for the contemporary generation. Especially for those who have grown weary of a sterile, historicist reading of the Bible, this classic move of liberal Protestant theology continues to evoke a widespread and immediate acceptance. Needless to say, I am highly critical of this theological position for a variety of reasons. I do not think that the canon ever functioned in this way in the church prior to the Enlightenment, nor do I believe it to be a correct way of doing biblical theology. The initial assumption of seeing a simple analogy between the prophet’s function and ours subverts the essential role of the canon which established theological continuity between the generations by means of the authority of sacred scripture. We are not prophets nor apostles, nor is our task directly analogous.<sup>28</sup>

Childs definitely helped to pull interpretation back from the granular interpretive approach of the historical-critical method to a central focus on the canonical text. This is good because it forces interpretation back to what we have, rather than conjectured background/historical materials. In addition, Childs is very skeptical that emulating how the prophets and apostles canonically shaped

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<sup>26</sup> Sheppard, "True and False Prophecy with Scripture," in *Canon, Theology, and Old Testament Interpretation*, 263.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 264.

<sup>28</sup> Brevard S. Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments: Theological Reflection on the Christian Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 137.



Scripture is helpful for contemporary interpretation. Childs thinks the canonical shaping process, and how it resulted in the text, is only helpful for understanding the final canonical form of the text. The major problem with Childs's approach is that he does not exclusively use the canonical form of the text for interpretation. Childs posits sources and editorial activity when arguing for his interpretations.

Helpful for the purposes of this study is Childs's interpretation of true versus false prophecy in Jeremiah 27–29.<sup>29</sup> Childs begins his interpretation by attempting to establish the relationship between chapters twenty-seven and twenty-eight. He thinks those chapters are part of a larger thought unit that goes from Jeremiah 23:9 to Jeremiah 29. Childs also argues that chapters twenty-seven and twenty-eight have the same overall structure. He divides chapter twenty-seven into three sections: verses 1–11, an oracle to the nations; verses 12–16, an oracle to the Judean king Zedekiah; verses 17–22, an oracle to the priests and people. All three of the oracles have the same structure: serve Nebuchadnezzar (vv. 7, 12, and 18), do not listen to other prophets because they are lying (vv. 9–10, 14, and 16), and if you continue to be disobedient you (and the temple vessels) will be taken into exile (vv. 11, 15, and 22).<sup>30</sup>

Childs points out clear parallels between chapters twenty-seven and twenty-eight. Childs states,

We next turn to ch. 28, which records the incident of the confrontation between Jeremiah and Hananiah (vv. 1–11). In v. 12 Jeremiah receives a divine word to address Hananiah. His oracles (vv. 12–16) follow the exact same pattern of ch. 27 with again closely paralleled vocabulary: (a) v. 14, the nations shall serve Nebuchadnezzar; (c) v. 15, Hananiah has spoken a lie; (d) v. 16, I will remove you from the earth. The variation in the pattern, especially respecting the missing (b) element, is clearly related to the preceding historical situation, and the addressing of the judgment oracle to Hananiah personally.<sup>31</sup>

Childs concludes that the final editor of the book of Jeremiah placed the two sections together in order to have chapter twenty-eight serve as an illustration of a confrontation with a false prophet. Childs

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<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 135–140.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 137–138.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 138.

deals with the issue in Jeremiah 28:5–9 where Jeremiah seems to doubt his prophecy when confronted by Hananiah. He argues against any kind of existential interpretation where Jeremiah actually doubted that he was a true prophet. In contrast, Childs argues Jeremiah was not willing to put God in a box and assume God would not relent and give mercy. Jeremiah departs and then returns with the conviction that his prediction of destruction is correct and that Hananiah is lying and not communicating a message from God (see Jer 23:25ff). Childs believes the text indicates the ultimate confirmation of a true prophet occurs when God acts and confirms the prophecy.<sup>32</sup> Childs makes his point when he states,

However, the major point to be made is that the present canonical form of the book of Jeremiah has rendered an interpretation of true and false prophecy and thereby provided a new criterion by means of its collected scriptures for distinguishing between the two. Through the canonical process Jeremiah's oracles were collected and treasured in the period following the destruction of Jerusalem, and the original criterion of Jeremiah for prophetic truth was applied. Jeremiah had been vindicated in Israel's history. God's judgment did fall on the nation, as Jeremiah had said. God had demonstrated by his action that Jeremiah was a true prophet. It was from this theological conviction in the exilic and post-exilic period that Jeremiah's words were collected and edited. In their canonical form they served the community of faith as an authoritative means for discerning the will of God and as a norm for distinguishing the true prophet from the false. If there had been confusion during Jeremiah's lifetime, there need be no longer.<sup>33</sup>

Child's argument suffers from the same problem as that of the historical-critical method.<sup>34</sup> Childs cannot provide convincing evidence for how the original audience of the historical event could

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<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 139.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 140–141.

<sup>34</sup> This differentiation of the actual historical event versus the event as recorded is discussed in the previous section on pages 12 and 13. It is pointed out in that section that the underlying historicity of the event is not in dispute. This author is convinced there must have been something in the actual message that the audience could use to judge the authenticity of the message. This author will provide his solution in the final section of this article.

have differentiated between the rival prophets. This defeats the purpose of the prophecy, which was to motivate to action. It is logical that any speaker would want to give their audience sufficient reasons to accept their arguments. Childs does not explain why Jeremiah would have assumed his audience would accept his prophecy.

### **James A. Sanders**

Sanders's view is similar to Childs's view in many ways. Sanders agrees with Childs that the formation of the canonical Scripture was a process by which editors worked with sources to produce the final form of the various books, but he believes there is more to using canon for interpretation than simply identifying the final form of the text.<sup>35</sup> Sanders defines canon criticism in the following way:

Canon criticism focuses on the function of authoritative traditions in the believing communities early or late. It is not uninterested in literary structure and does not denigrate those disciplines which focus on structure, such as form criticism, redaction criticism, and structural analysis, or which focus on the final form of the text. Close attention to textual structure may indicate proper function. But, in consonance with later emphases in tradition criticism and especially comparative midrash, canonical criticism stresses what the function of a tradition, in whatever form it is found, had when called on for his or her community by a trident. What authority or value did the trident seek in the tradition? How did he or she see use it?<sup>36</sup>

The main concern of Sanders is the understanding and use of a piece of tradition throughout the process of canonization. This is not very surprising in and of itself, and is similar to the view of Childs, but unlike Childs, Sanders believes this process continues all the way up to our modern context. Sanders conceives of this process as a triangle. The bottom left-hand point of the triangle is the tradition/text. This corner represents anytime "the tradition or text being called upon, recited, alluded to."<sup>37</sup> This includes the entire

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<sup>35</sup> James A. Sanders, *Canon and Community: A Guide to Canonical Criticism*, Guides to Biblical Scholarship (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 24–25.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

history of development/interpretation from the very first traditions all the way to the modern day.<sup>38</sup> The bottom right-hand point of the triangle is the historical and sociological context. Like the tradition interpretation point, the sociological context goes from the very beginning up to modern times. The purpose of this triangle point is to determine and then exegete the sociological context in addition to the text. This process includes all the relevant tools of historical criticism.<sup>39</sup> The top point is the canonical critical hermeneutical principles, which Sanders believes, will guide the interpreter to correct interpretation. Sanders believes that the interaction of the original context and the modern context can generate different meanings, depending on the combined context. Sanders believes the interpreter needs to concentrate on identifying unrecorded hermeneutical principles, which are discernable by reading between the lines of the text. He asserts that if the interpreter uses these hermeneutical principles along with historical-critical methods the interpreter will identify resignifications. Sanders defines resignifications as contemporary meanings that exist within canonical limits of the text.<sup>40</sup> Sanders's canonical critical process is ultimately a form of reader response interpretation. Sanders does, however, attempt to impose some limits on the interpretation through his analysis of canonical hermeneutics.

Sanders does not write as much as Childs on the situation in Jeremiah 28, but he does give some insight into how he sees true versus false prophecy working. Before getting into the specifics of Jeremiah 28, it seems that it would be good to give the reader a general overview of Sanders's view of false teaching:

Both those we call the true prophets and those we call the false prophets cited the same Torah tradition: they had the same gospel story of God's gracious acts in the past in creating Israel. The difference was that the official theologians employed a hermeneutic of continuity, while the canonical prophets (the "true" prophets whose books we inherit) employed an existentialist hermeneutic which stressed neither

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<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 77–78.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

continuity or discontinuity but rather on the basis of the Torah, raised the probing question as to Israel's true identity.<sup>41</sup>

This is important to note because Sanders does not believe the difference between the true and the false prophets was a difference in their overall belief systems. He believes they both were drawing from the same set of traditions, but were using different hermeneutical systems and therefore, reached differing conclusions. In reference to Jeremiah 28, Sanders believes that Hananiah was preaching a restricted message of God as the redeemer and sustainer of his people. Jeremiah accepted this message but also added the truth that God is also the sovereign creator who has the right and ability to judge his people. This judgment goes all the way up to removing them from the land he had given them. Sanders sees the primary difference between Jeremiah and Hananiah as the idea that the false prophet did not acknowledge God as the sovereign creator (even over Israel's enemies). Sanders saw the false prophets as denying the canonical monotheizing process, which was the process by which Israel developed a monotheistic belief system and how any sort of polytheism was unacceptable. Sanders believes that by not preaching this the false prophets were risking people falling back into polytheism in order to attribute the bad things happening to another god rather than to Yahweh. This is what made them false prophets.<sup>42</sup>

The problem with Sanders's position is that it depends on the idea that the Israelite religion developed in a slow process from polytheism to monotheism. This only works if this process actually occurred. Sanders simply assumes and asserts this as happening. More importantly, there is no evidence in the context that Hananiah denied God's sovereignty over creation. In fact, it could be argued that Hananiah prophesying the return of the exiles was emphasizing God's sovereignty and that Jeremiah was denying that God had control over the pagan nations. This possibility undermines Sanders's

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<sup>41</sup> James A. Sanders, *Torah and Canon* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1972), 88.

<sup>42</sup> James A. Sanders, "Hermeneutics in True and False Prophecy," in *Canon and Authority*, ed. George W. Coats and Burke O. Long (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), 39–40.

approach and means that he is left without viable criteria for determining false prophecy.

### **James E. Brenneman**

James Brenneman's stated goal in his book is to synthesize the work on canonical criticism done by James Sanders with the work of contemporary secular literary critics.<sup>43</sup> The book consists of two parts. The first part of the book evaluates Sanders's work and applies postmodern literary interpretive techniques to it.<sup>44</sup> The second section of the book applies the principles defined in the first part of the book to the issue of true vs. false prophecy in Scripture.<sup>45</sup>

Brenneman wastes no time in laying out his underlying presupposition. He believes that the Bible contradicts itself.<sup>46</sup> Brenneman supports this presupposition by quoting Sanders extensively. One of Sanders's quotations in particular encapsulates the underlying presupposition cogently and comprehensively:

The fact is that the Bible contains multiple voices, and not only in passages recording differences between disagreeing colleagues (so-called true and false prophets), but between the priestly and the prophetic, between Wisdom and tradition, between the orthodox and the questioning voices of the prophets such as Jeremiah in his confessions, between Job and his friends who represented aspects of orthodoxy, between Qohelet and the Torah, between Jonah and Nahum (both of who addressed God's concern for Nineveh), among varied voices within a book like Isaiah, between Paul and James, and even among the Gospels with their varying views of what God was doing in Christ. And these are only a few of the intrabiblical dialogues one might mention. One needs also to recognize the measure of pluralism in the doublets and triplets of the Bible, the same thing told in quite different ways, making different even contradicting points.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> James E. Brenneman, *Canons in Conflict: Negotiating Texts in True and False Prophecy* (New York: Oxford U P, 1997), 4.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 4–5.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>47</sup> James A. Sanders, "The Integrity of Biblical Pluralism," in *"Not in Heaven": Coherence and Complexity in Biblical Narrative*, ed. Jason Philip Rosenblatt and Joseph C. Sitterson (Bloomington: Indiana U P, 1991), 162–163.

Brenneman argues against a “fundamentalist” understanding of the text, including both “religious fundamentalists” and “secular fundamentalists.” He is critical of “religious fundamentalist” who attempt to smooth out obvious difficulties because he believes it relieves them of the “hard work” that is necessary to navigate contradictory contexts. By doing so, he discounts conservative evangelical scholarship out of hand. He has more of a problem with what he calls “secular fundamentalists” (historical-critical scholars). He believes that “secular fundamentalists” who attempt to identify multiple sources to get back to the authentic earliest sources are misguided. Brenneman thinks that this is misguided because it does not take into account that community interpretational standards used to define “orthodoxy” are subjective. He does not think it is possible to judge objectively the interpretational standards in any particular community against the interpretational standards of other communities.<sup>48</sup> Brenneman keys in on this idea and expands it throughout the history of the church. He believes (along with Sanders) that the idea of intra-biblical pluralism (contradictions) is the key to contemporary relevance.<sup>49</sup> He attempts to advance this argument by an appeal to intertextuality (from literary theory).<sup>50</sup> He believes that intertextuality guarantees ambiguity of meaning and that any attempt to identify a determinate authorially intended meaning is impossible.<sup>51</sup> Brenneman moves past Sanders’s position on the importance of history because Sanders wants to maintain at least some importance of history.<sup>52</sup> Brenneman makes an incredible statement, which sums up his approach to interpretation:

Such a commitment is not unimportant because to the degree both Iser (literary critic) and Sanders (canonical critic) appeal to the text’s determinacy for claims of interpretive constraint (and methodological objectivity), their systems falter. For example, without their dependence

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<sup>48</sup> Brenneman, *Canons in Conflict*, 14.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>50</sup> It is not possible in this limited study to explore the implications of intertextuality. This study will simply accept Brenneman’s understanding of it for the sake of argument and explore the implications for biblical interpretation.

<sup>51</sup> Brenneman, *Canons in Conflict*, 25.

<sup>52</sup> Sanders, *Canon and Community*, 19.

on the text's determinacy, they could not say that the reader's activities are constrained by it; they could not say that the reader's activities are constrained by it; they could not, in the same breath, honor and bypass history by stabilizing the structure the text contains; and they could not free the text from the constraints of referential meaning yet say that the meaning yet say that the meanings produced by countless readers are part of the text's potential.

In point of fact, the restraint placed on the reader does not come from a determinate text; rather, it comes from the interpretive community whose norms and interpretive strategy that requires them, therefore neither component can constitute the independent given that serves to ground the interpretive process. In other words, determinacies and indeterminacies are the products of an interpretive strategy that requires them, therefore neither component can constitute the independent given that serves to ground the interpretive process.<sup>53</sup>

Based on the standard described above, this author cannot see how anyone using Brenneman's methodology could arrive at definitive standards for determining true versus false prophecy.

Let us examine how Brenneman deals with Jeremiah 28. Brenneman does not deal with this passage extensively, but what he does say about Jeremiah 28 is significant and reveals a great deal about his approach to prophecy, as well as implications for general biblical hermeneutics. He uses G. T. Sheppard's critique of Childs's interpretation and evaluation of Jeremiah 28 as the basis for his interpretation. Sheppard is generally supportive of Childs's interpretation with some important caveats, which Brenneman wholeheartedly supports.<sup>54</sup> Brenneman thinks that Sheppard is right in exposing the problems of attempting to formulate criteria for determining true and false prophecy. He especially appreciates Sheppard's emphasis on the conflict between Jeremiah and Hananiah as being a political argument between the representatives of two opposing factions.<sup>55</sup> Brenneman concludes from this that the only respective groups to which the prophets belong can judge the truthfulness of the opposing positions. This can be seen clearly, when

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<sup>53</sup> Brenneman, *Canons in Conflict*, 47.

<sup>54</sup> Sheppard, "True and False Prophecy with Scripture," in *Canon, Theology, and Old Testament Interpretation*, 270.

<sup>55</sup> Brenneman, *Canons in Conflict*, 92.



he states, “In this story of research, as in the biblical accounts themselves, the persuasion models of literary–critical inquiry coincide with the sociocanonical claims regarding power. Both reading groups function without transcendental norms, in keeping with the postmodern reader.”<sup>56</sup> Basically, he sees the conflict of true versus false prophecy in Jeremiah 28 as simply being an argument between two opposing groups with no way of determining which is right or wrong because the determination of absolute truth is impossible.

Unlike Sheppard, or any of the rest of the scholars presented so far, Brenneman extends the idea of reading communities determining meaning to the modern reader in a maximalist sense. Brenneman argues that modern readers should evaluate the various prophets contained in the Bible and determine based on the canons of their particular reading community whether a prophet is true or false. The test case he uses is Isaiah 2:4 and Joel 4:10. These two passages use the phrase “beating swords into plowshares, spears into pruning hooks” in a seemingly contradictory manner. He goes to great lengths to show the passages as irreconcilable and contradictory.<sup>57</sup> This author will grant that the two are contradictory for the purposes of this study, although this author is not convinced of his conclusions concerning these two passages. This allows us to examine how Brenneman reaches his conclusion about how to decide which passage is true prophecy and which passage is false prophecy. He states his conclusion concerning these two passages as follows:

I reject Joel 4:9-17 as true prophecy and would argue that in, if not yet, its voice will become, in functional terms, as canonically marginalized as other “texts of terror” are increasingly becoming (on women) or have already become (on slavery). Could it be that future generations will consider the question of sacred violence in the name of Yahweh as canonically closed, functionally if not formally?<sup>58</sup>

Brenneman is using his personal abhorrence of violence and the community sensibilities of the modern/postmodern culture to dictate the moral acceptability of Scripture. The question this author has is

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<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 92–93.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 132–133.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 141.

where does this stop and why is his viewpoint any more valid than anyone else's? Why would the view of a radical theologian who wants to remake the government into a theocratic state not have the right to declare passages like Romans 13 and 1 Peter 2 which call for obedience to government as false? For the purposes of this study, Brennenman gives us even less an objective standard than either Childs or Sanders. At least Childs and Sanders both accept after-the-fact validation of true versus false prophecy.

### *Socio-Scientific Approach*

The general idea of this approach is not to simply state what or even why the prophets did certain things and gave certain messages, but to determine the role of the prophet in society. Wilson's comprehensive study examines four areas related to prophecy. The first area examines practices in various modern societies that Wilson believes are analogous to prophecy. The second area examines ANE evidence concerning prophecy. The third area examines what he calls the Ephraimite prophetic tradition (the bulk of the book). The last area examines Judean prophetic traditions both in the writing prophets as well as in the books of Chronicles.<sup>59</sup>

Wilson uses the term *intermediaries* as a non-biased term for different types of people who serve as conduits to the spirit world. Wilson breaks down intermediaries into two broad and general categories, peripheral and central. Wilson describes the two in the following statement:

In general, peripheral intermediaries are usually involved in advancing the views of the spirits and of the intermediaries' own support groups. The aim is to improve the status of peripheral groups and individuals and to bring about changes in the social order. In contrast, central intermediaries are concerned with maintaining the established social order and with regulating the pace of social change.<sup>60</sup>

The conclusion Wilson reaches is an intermediary's social group makes the ultimate determination of the truth or falsehood of a message. These expectations can include certain actions and/or ways

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<sup>59</sup> Robert R. Wilson, *Prophecy and Society in Ancient Israel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), 19.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.

of speaking. An intermediary who deviates too far from expectations runs the real risk of being rejected (both the message and personally).<sup>61</sup>

After examining the ANE evidence, Wilson concludes there are distinct similarities between the ANE phenomenon and modern practices and it would be likely that the practices of ancient Israel would be similar.<sup>62</sup>

Wilson's examination of what he calls the Ephraimite prophetic traditions consists of three conclusions. The first conclusion is the Ephraimite prophetic tradition used "stereotypical speech patterns and employed a distinctive vocabulary."<sup>63</sup> The second conclusion is the Ephraimite prophets were identified by certain behavioral practices. The last conclusion is the Ephraimite prophets' societal role seems to have changed over time. Early in Israel's history, prophets such as Abraham, Moses, and Samuel served as central intermediaries. This changed when the monarchy arose (especially after the division of the kingdom) to the prophets becoming peripheral intermediaries who attempted to change the social structure of the kingdoms.<sup>64</sup>

Wilson's conclusions are much sparser concerning the Judean prophetic traditions:

For the most part, Judean prophets appear to have had fewer stereotypical behavioral characteristics than their northern counterparts, and this may indicate that the Judean had no standard model for prophetic behavior. Although they used the distinctive term "visionary" to characterize their intermediaries and stressed the vision as the normal mode of revelation, the southerners did not associate any distinctive behavior with the visionary, whom they equated with other types of intermediaries, such as the prophet and the diviner. Similarly, we found little evidence that Judean prophets used stereotypical speech as a part of their possession behavior.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 66–67.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 133–134.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 251.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 252.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 294.

In contrast to the Ephraimite tradition, the Judean tradition seems to have generally performed a central intermediary function that worked to ensure the passing on of tradition as well as trying to ensure that any societal change took place in an orderly manner. According to Wilson, in spite of most Judean prophets being central intermediaries, some prophets seem to have functioned on the periphery. He thinks some of those prophets, such as Isaiah, seem to have moved back and forth while others seem to have moved permanently to the periphery, possibly under the influence of the Deuteronomistic reform.<sup>66</sup>

Wilson has a brief discussion of the Jeremiah 28 confrontation between Jeremiah and Hananiah. Wilson believes that

Hananiah's behavior is exactly the same as that of Jeremiah, and both prophets use the same forms of speech. In addition, the conflicting oracles are both rooted in orthodox Yahwistic traditions. Jeremiah's prophecies are informed by the Ephraimite tradition, while Hananiah's words reflect the Jerusalemite theology of the inviolability of Zion (Jer 28:1-4). The incident is thus a clear example of conflicting prophetic claims which cannot be adjudicated on the basis of the prophets' words or deeds. Rather, the observer can decide which of the prophecies to believe only if he has already recognized the authority of one prophet or the other.<sup>67</sup>

Wilson believes the author/editor of this section was a follower of the Ephraimite prophetic tradition. In light of this fact, Wilson believes the author/editor's decision of which of the participants was the true prophet was obvious. In the author/editor's mind, Jeremiah was clearly a prophet like Moses and had a direct connection to the word of Yahweh. Jeremiah's response shows the connection clearly. Jeremiah claimed he was a true prophet because his message was going to come true. In addition, Jeremiah argues there were many previous prophets who predicted judgment that came true, but the salvation prophets like Hananiah left the people waiting for salvation that never comes. Wilson thinks the editor believed Yahweh reaffirmed his judgment to Jeremiah who then pronounced judgment

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 294–295.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 250.

on Hananiah. These actions demonstrated to the author/editor that Jeremiah was the true prophet.<sup>68</sup>

The key issue concerning this interpretation is that Wilson bases his judgment about which is the true and false prophet on the idea that this is a conflict between two different prophet social groups (interpretational communities). According to Wilson, the only way someone in the audience could determine which of the participants was the true versus the false prophet was through the interpretational framework that their prophetic social group provided. This is in many ways very similar to the previous canonical approaches with the additional idea of there being a peripheral/central intermediary sociological conflict.

Ultimately the most important problem with this approach is it does not do justice to the actual message and whether one or both actually conform to the received tradition. It is a big assumption that both messages actually correspond to the received tradition. In addition, there was no analysis of the broader context of the narrative.

### *Contextual Approach*

There is almost universal agreement amongst OT scholars that there are verbal parallels between the book of Deuteronomy and Jeremiah. In 1895, Driver noted there are sixty–six passages (used at least eighty–six times) in Deuteronomy that are referenced in Jeremiah.<sup>69</sup> The only question is the direction of the influence. All of the previous interpretational approaches would accept this data and that there is some sort of relationship between the two books. Those approaches would view Jeremiah as coming first in time, based on acceptance of source-critical dating assumptions that do not allow Deuteronomy to be the source of Jeremiah’s teachings. Mackay sums up this idea well:

Deuteronomy is no longer of Mosaic provenance, and may only have been written just before it was ‘discovered’. Furthermore, the historical narrative found in Joshua–2 Kings also exhibits the same Deuteronomic style, and so there developed the view that a scribal school arose in exilic and postexilic times that was responsible for the Deuteronomic

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 250–251.

<sup>69</sup> S. R. Driver, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 3rd ed., ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1902), xciii.

history (Joshua–2 Kings) and also for the passages in Jeremiah which exhibit similar stylistic tendencies.<sup>70</sup>

This would mean that no antecedent revelation would be available to Jeremiah. This is the ultimate reason that previous interpretational styles were unable to provide any useful criteria for evaluating true versus false prophecy. On the other hand, if Deuteronomy precedes Jeremiah, it could serve as the background for the book. This would allow the identification of criteria for distinguishing between true and false prophecy based on the content of Deuteronomy. Mackay gives another interesting point concerning why this is likely:

From a conservative point of view there is little problem. Centuries earlier Moses wrote Deuteronomy, and the influence of the founder of the nation and his book on the subsequent thinking and religious vocabulary of the people may be taken for granted. Furthermore, if Deuteronomy constituted part or the whole of the scroll found in the Temple in 622 BC, then it would have been natural for the style of that work to be copied by others. What we are observing is the shared literary style common to authors in that age.<sup>71</sup>

The finding of the law during the reign of Josiah was a ground-shaking event that clearly influenced the culture in significant ways. This helps to explain similarities between Jeremiah and the historical corpus consisting of Joshua to 2 Kings because they were both composed at a time when there was a significant common literary influence on the society. If nothing else, the effects on Josiah (as seen in 2 Kings) and his reforms demonstrate the effects of finding the book of the law had on Judean society.

This contextual method (also know a literal grammatical-historical method) would not accept a late dating for Deuteronomy unless there were overriding evidence. Even among historical-critical scholars, there is no consensus on dating the various sources posited for the Pentateuch. As far as this author can ascertain, the only historical-critical dating consensus for the Pentateuch is the final form from the postexilic period. Since the contextual interpretational

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<sup>70</sup> J. L. Mackay, *Jeremiah: Chapters 1-20* (Fearn, Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2004), 29.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

approach would not accept the late dating of the Pentateuch, it would see Deuteronomy as being the primary background context for the book of Jeremiah. Therefore, Deuteronomy will be a helpful guide going forward in determining criteria for true versus false prophecy.

The first step in defining criteria is to determine any thematic elements from Deuteronomy that Jeremiah is utilizing. The second step will be to compare these thematic elements with the content of the messages of Jeremiah and Hananiah in Jeremiah 28 to determine the criteria for true versus false prophecy.

The idea that Deuteronomy utilizes the form of a Hittite suzerain/vassal has been proposed by many scholars and is potentially significant to this study.<sup>72</sup> There is a consistent form for these treaties, which corresponds closely to Deuteronomy. This structure includes a preamble, historical prologue, stipulations (general and specific), deposition in the vassal's temple of the treaty along with stipulated periodic readings of the treaty, blessings/curses, and witnesses.<sup>73</sup> This type of treaty structure was prevalent during the second millennium BC and had a standard form. On the other hand, the treaty structure used during the first millennium BC was markedly different.<sup>74</sup> The structure of Deuteronomy follows the suzerain/vassal treaty form closely. The preamble is found in Deuteronomy 1:1–5. The historic prologue is found in Deuteronomy 1–4. The covenantal stipulations are found in Deuteronomy 5, 12–26. The provision for deposition and periodic reading is found in Deuteronomy 31:9–13, 26. The blessings and curses are found in Deuteronomy 27–28.<sup>75</sup> The witnesses' section does exist in a slightly modified form. This was because the absolute monotheism of ancient Israel did not have any other gods to serve as witnesses. In the case of Deuteronomy, it is possible that heaven and earth stand in as witnesses for the non–

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<sup>72</sup> Eugene H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, NAC, ed. E. Ray Clendenen, vol. 4 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 29–30.

<sup>73</sup> George E. Mendenhall, "Covenant Forms in Israelite Tradition," *The Biblical Archaeologist* 17, no. 3 (1954): 58–60.

<sup>74</sup> K. A. Kitchen, *Ancient Orient and Old Testament* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1966), 92–96.

<sup>75</sup> Jack R. Lundbom, *Deuteronomy: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 20–21.

existent gods of heaven and earth in Deuteronomy 30:18,<sup>76</sup> alternatively, simply because heaven and earth will always be around to serve as witnesses.

There are two clear implications for use of this treaty type. The first implication is that this treaty is clearly conditional. The second implication is there are clear consequences for breaking the treaty. These implications provide two clear characteristics of false prophets in Jeremiah. The first characteristic is that false prophets preach a false sense of security by not preaching the conditionality of God's covenant.<sup>77</sup> The second characteristic is that the false prophets are "those who do not warn the people to flee immorality and idolatry; those who make predictions in spite of their theological ignorance."<sup>78</sup> Chisholm sums up the message of a true prophet best when he sums up the overall theology of the book of Jeremiah:

God's judgment would fall on Judah because she had broken His covenant. The people worshiped other gods, and the religious and civil leaders were hopelessly corrupt. Sword, plague, and famine would devastate the land and many would be carried into exile. However, God would also judge the arrogant nations and eventually restore His people to their land. He would establish a new covenant with the reunited Northern and Southern kingdoms and replace the ineffective kings and priests of Jeremiah's day with an ideal Davidic ruler (Messiah) and a purified priesthood.<sup>79</sup>

Prophets who did not preach this message were false because they were not proclaiming to the truth of God's revealed word and calling the people to covenantal repentance. In terms of Jeremiah 28,

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<sup>76</sup> Edward J. Woods, *Deuteronomy: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, vol. 5 (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2011), 296–297.

<sup>77</sup> Thomas W. Overholt, *The Threat of Falsehood: A Study in the Theology of the Book of Jeremiah*, Studies in Biblical Theology, vol. 16, 2d series (London: SCM P, 1970), 1.

<sup>78</sup> Paul R. House, *Old Testament Theology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1998), 316.

<sup>79</sup> Robert B. Chisholm Jr., "A Theology of Jeremiah and Lamentations," in *A Biblical Theology of the Old Testament*, ed. Roy B. Zuck, Eugene H. Merrill, and Darrel L. Bock (Chicago: Moody, 1996), 341.



Hananiah was a false prophet because he is not preaching the conditionality of God's covenant with Moses and was presenting at best an incomplete picture of how God related to Israel. This can be seen in Jeremiah 28:8–9 where Jeremiah argues that the primary role of a prophet is to warn the people of doom for their actions, not to proclaim good news.

Several places in Jeremiah clearly refer to the covenantal obligations of Deuteronomy. Jeremiah 3:3 (also seen in Joel 1:17–20 and Amos 4:7–8) ties the consequences of idolatry (spiritual adultery) to God's judgment of famine in the land, which is an allusion to Deuteronomy 28:20–24.<sup>80</sup> Another passage in Jeremiah that brings out the idea of covenantal obligations is Jeremiah 11:1–17. God instructs Jeremiah in Jeremiah 11:1–17 to preach to the people the consequences of obedience/disobedience to the covenant. There are allusions in this passage to the covenant blessing and curses in Deuteronomy 27:14–26.<sup>81</sup> A final passage, Jeremiah 34:8–14, talks about the consequences that God is bringing on them for not observing the sabbatical year and freeing slaves/canceling debts. The entire basis for this passage is Deuteronomy 15:1–6.<sup>82</sup>

It is also true that false prophets' predictions were destined to fail (Deut 13:1–5) and that the punishment for failure was death.<sup>83</sup> This provided the ultimate confirmation of true versus false prophecy, but it did not give the recipients of the actual prophecies any way of knowing whether a message was true when the prophet gave the message. Deuteronomy, on the other hand, provides clear criteria for how to discern true prophecy. True prophecy calls God's people back to covenantal obedience so that they could avoid the covenantal curses.

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<sup>80</sup> F. B. Huey, *Jeremiah, Lamentations*, NAC, ed. E. Ray Clendenen, vol. 16 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1993), 71.

<sup>81</sup> John M. Bracke, *Jeremiah 1-29*, Westminster Bible Companion, ed. Patrick D. Miller and David L. Bartlett (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 2000), 105.

<sup>82</sup> Kaiser and Rata, *Walking the Ancient Paths*, 9.

<sup>83</sup> Earl S. Kalland, "Deuteronomy," in *Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 & 2 Samuel*, The Expositor's Bible Commentary with the New International Version, ed. F. E. Gaebelien, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 97–98.

## **Conclusion**

This study examined various interpretational options to see if they could be used to identify criteria for false prophecy. The contextual approach was the only method that could identify criteria for false prophets/prophecy that the recipients of the prophecy could have used to determine whether it was true or false. The best the other interpretational options could offer was to point out who was the false prophet after the fact. There are various reasons why these methods failed. All of them, except for contextual approach, accept certain document dating assumptions that limit their interpretational options. All of the interpretation methods (with the exception of contextual) to one degree or another are also invested in a modern and/or postmodern worldview, which do not allow for absolute truth claims. This leads them to argue that the determination of meaning is based on the specific reading/interpretational community of a prophet. The most extreme form was Brenneman who rejects Micah as a prophet because Micah's message does not fit his contemporary interpretational community. Ultimately the way true versus false prophecy is determined is by comparing the message of a prophet to antecedent revelation. This type of comparison will reveal the truth of the message and the messenger.